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SUBJECT: CODEL HAGEL MEETS WITH CROWN PRINCE AT GULF

DIALOGUE CONFERENCE

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Bahrain's Crown Prince Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa met with Senators Chuck Hagel, Dianne Feinstein and Lincoln Chafee and their staff on December 4 on the margins of the "Gulf Dialogue," an international conference sponsored by the GOB and organized by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). The Codel raised concerns about the future of Iraq, the peace process and the importance of the two upcoming elections in the region. The CP underscored the importance of continued U.S. engagement in the region and Bahrain's commitment to supporting democratic development in both Iraq and for the Palestinian people. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The CP opened the meeting by thanking the Senators for their continued support for Bahrain. He said he thought it important to first recognize the burden the U.S. carries in the region. Bahrain is grateful for the significant sacrifices the U.S. has made for the region's benefit. Senator Hagel praised Bahrain's leadership on regional issues, its own reform efforts and noted the long-standing warm relations with the U.S. He thanked Bahrain for its support of the Gulf Dialogue. The off-the-record Gulf Dialogue brought together the national security leadership of Gulf Cooperation Council states along with its neighbors (notably Iraq) and key allies including the U.S., the UK and France. Having the Gulf Dialogue in Manama was a natural fit, playing to Bahrain's strengths. He said it was the lack of strategic alliances in the region and the need to build those kinds of relationships that led to his support for IISS efforts to organize such a conference and the Codel's participation.

¶3. (C) Turning to the comments made by the CP earlier that morning, Hagel asked what Bahrain expected would happen after elections in Iraq. The CP noted Bahrain's own concerns about Saddam's Iraq. However, he admitted the GOB did not support the war at the outset. Despite growing insecurity before the elections, Bahrain sees the U.S. presence in Iraq as ultimately a stabilizing factor in the region. Once held, the elections will help to establish the legitimate institutions that regional governments will be able to work with. The principal concern Bahrain now has is who will win the elections and whether those new institutions will be friendly to the U.S. or will more radical elements take hold. He added that despite the short-term need to plus-up troop numbers, he believed foreign troops should eventually be replaced by regional peacekeepers.

¶4. (C) Senator Feinstein raised the Palestinian elections, noted the need to take advantage of this historic opportunity for peace, and called on the CP to support Abu Mazen. Feinstein urged Gulf state leaders to speak out on the need for a two-state solution in Palestine in order to ostracize extremists on both sides and bring the Arab media on board. The CP said that Bahrain understood that the death of Arafat, a man he did not respect, was an opening. Yet, while there is an opportunity to do things a new way, the key remained the same: the U.S. must be more effective in winning hearts and minds in the region. Therefore the U.S. must, even if politically difficult, engage in a public discourse that demonstrates that the goal of promoting democracy in the Middle East includes Palestinians as well. At the same time, he said, we in the region need to hold the Palestinians accountable for their actions. He feared that the U.S. would blame any new Palestinian leadership for individual acts of violence he believed inevitable. Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak al Khalifa added that the most pressing concern for the GOB was the current leadership vacuum and support for Abu Mazen was secondary to successful elections. On Iraq, Senator Feinstein urged Bahrain to convey the message to the Iraqi leadership that Sunnis must be included in Iraq's future or the violence will continue.

¶5. (C) Senator Chafee noted that a common refrain was echoed in the conference: that U.S. interests in the Middle East are guided only by a desire to steal the region's oil. He asked for the CP's views on how U.S. consumption of oil promotes those stereotypes and whether the U.S. is rightly vulnerable to that accusation. The CP said he believed that the market itself, as it adapted to new realities, would help to correct

that view. First and most importantly, growing economies like China and India will soon outpace U.S. consumption. Second, the current rise in the price of oil, which many wrongly see as the region's salvation, is due not only to increased consumption but inefficiencies in the refining process. Once these inefficiencies are corrected and the price drops, then the argument that the U.S. seeks to rob the region of its oil becomes less persuasive.

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